

To Whom It May Concern,

Western Washington University has continuously made many of us Black students feel tokenized and taken advantage of. We do recognize that the forum on Friday, December 7th 2018, was for the student body as a whole, but feel that our voices were ignored at a forum that was in response to the racial hate crime, that targeted the entire population of Black students on campus. We are fighting against an institution that exploits us, but felt just as exploited by the same people that were supposed to support and give us space.

The document, “The Student Body’s Demands for Urgent Needs”, **did not** explicitly state the needs Black students put forth on the original document finalized on Thursday, December 6th, 2018. The first student who pointed out the tokenization of Black students and neglectful acts at the forum was told that the Black students would have time at the end to speak. Then another student pointed out that Black students were still not being represented in the conversation or the demands. She was completely ignored as the forum progressed and one of the organizers gave a different student the mic. As the organizers were ending the forum, one Black student called out the complete neglect of the Black voices and needs. A community should be the first to be recognized and listened to, if they are the community under attack, regardless of race or sexual identity.

To make it clear, we appreciate and support the intentions of the organizers who put each of these actions on. We want to acknowledge the erasure of our voices within the forum and the walk out. We also recognize that we are a minority of the minority within the Ethnic Student Center. At times, we do not feel welcomed or included in the ESC. There is anti-blackness within the ESC and we want it to be recognized. Many Black students have avoided the ESC or have been forced to make a space for themselves. We support the ESC, Students for Ethnic Studies, and many of the other marginalized groups. One of the ways we are all united is through acts of racism and hate against us. We extend ourselves because their fight is our fight and justice for them is justice for us. At the end of the day, our support and dedication is not reciprocated from others. We are here to fight for ourselves, because we fight so hard for other groups.

Although, we want to acknowledge the hard work put into all this student lead activism by the organizers, we, as some of the Black community leaders, have had to dedicate even more of our time to make sure our voices are heard by creating this statement. We experienced disregard from our own community when we are already feeling disregarded by the institution, social society, and the world. We feel that other students of color used this opportunity to walk on the backs of Black students and Black labor.

After the forum, we decompressed and decided to create a space for Black students to reflect on their feelings about the forum. This was supposed to make a difference for us. We loved Ama's speech about her experience navigating Western as a Black student. We cried with her and felt her anger, but were snubbed by the administration and the deans of the colleges, when her final question was not addressed. Our pain and tears when Ama gave her speech were used to set the mood for the forum, even though they were real and justified.

We wholeheartedly empathize with Ted Pratt and in **no way agree** with the demand for his immediate resignation. Dean Pratt made a comment about the struggle of being Black while surrounded by white people and we acknowledge the difficulties that faculty of color face. We have since been made aware by some of our community that they have felt that certain remarks by Ted Pratt were problematic and hope that actions will be taken towards the training of all professionals at Western, so that future comments will not be made. We still want to state that he has been seen as an ally for many Black students and a professional that we can talk to at any time that we can relate to. The forum and demands went into all kinds of other student issues that we see important as well, but didn't completely address our needs as a Black community.

Historically we are used to perpetuate any movement other than our own. There was no focus on the fact that there are students who are fearful for their safety and their lives.

The Demands We Ask of Our Community:

Considering the fact that the Black students were most affected to the point where they were uncomfortable to go to class or feel safe with an identity they simply can't hide, we feel disrespected by the actions that transpired at the forum. Therefore, we ask the following demands:

1. Acknowledgement that the foremost issue on campus at this moment is that Black students do not feel safe to even come to class or walk on campus. We need to work to make sure the population of Black students will still remain on this campus.
2. Funds generated via Venmo must be donated equally to support the students of color that organized the forum and sit in. This forum was meant to address the fact that the institution profits off Black labor and pain, but those said organizers then did exactly the same. .
3. No other forum or meeting with administration in the future should take place without direct input from BSU, ACC, and QTPOC because as the organizers stated in the planning meeting, "a person of color is not a person of consciousness."
4. Consider us in all future events as a prominent voice and NOT as a last ditch effort. We also want to specifically note that at the meeting before, we spoke to organizers about the lack of Black voices - a comment they obviously ignored. We also want to comment on

the limited number of Black voices that were invited to be involved in the pre-planning meeting.

In closing, this in no way represents dissent or a divide in the Black community at Western Washington University or the ESC. This statement is a testament to the, using a forum organizer 's own words, multifaceted Black people that we are. We are united and support each other as Black students at a predominantly white institution. This university promotes the idea of active minds and that is what this statement was created by, as were the forum and the walk out. Moving forward, we need **All** Black voices to be heard and acknowledged.

We reached out to the Black organizers of the forum to discuss our reactions. They made it clear that it was not their intention to silence our Black voices and said they would acquiesce their demands that we did not approve. Other organizers have since apologized for their actions that made us feel hurt and silenced.

We release this statement for everyone at Western Washington University to realize the privilege they have to be able to speak over Black voices, especially our peers with in the ESC. We reach out for everyone to understand that this is not an attack or a personal vendetta, but this is only how most of the Black students felt about the forum. This is how Black students feel every single day at Western.

Sincerely,

Fatuma Musa
Shaneen Walter-Edwards
Selome Zerai
Ama Monkah
Abdul Malik Ford
Jada Rogers
Labra Ambo
Jade Jordan
Quarazine Orato
Khadijah Pritchett
Hannah Okotcha
Elizabeth Kelly
Mikaila Moe
Yapheth McMichael
Ikenna Onukwufor
Joviana Smith

Lydia Ashenafie
Rahel Abraham
Carol Githinji
Yared Belete
Brandi Smetko
Ashley Lockett
Chante Lee
Ariana Dixon
Anna Iyun
Catherine Kiniu
Lamor Odingo
Martha Jeanice
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Winta Berhe
Meron Knutzen

Jude Ahmed
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